

CHEESE FARE SUNDAY

Before the Sixth Gospel Reading at Passion Matins on Holy and Great Friday, we sing a hymn that is repeated by the priest in the preparation rite (i.e., Prothesis or Proskomedia) of each Divine Liturgy: *“You have redeemed us from the curse of the law with Your Precious Blood; nailed to the cross and pierced with the lance, You have become a fountain of immortality for us; glory to You, our Savior.”*

These words remind us that Christ is our Redeemer, Who has ransomed us from the captivity of sin and hell.

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. / Surely He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows / like a lamb led to the slaughter, and like a sheep without blemish, that is silent before the shearer, He opened not his mouth. / He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (*Prophecy of Isaiah 53*) By his humility, Christ has overcome the pride of Satan and the sins of mankind.

For this reason, we do not cease in giving praise and glory to God for the mighty things He has done. We are, above all, to thank God for the salvation He brings us as well as for those gifts He shares with us in our daily lives.

Because Christ has redeemed *all* humanity from the curse of the law with His Precious Blood, worship is a corporate rather than private affair. By submitting to God and focusing on Him in worship, we also submit to one another. If we cannot accept the relationship we have with others during our corporate worship, we will never be able to submit to God, Who demands so much more than patience.

The Liturgy is not a time for private prayer or devotions, much less for quiet reflection. In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ Himself suggests that quiet, private prayer be accomplished in a quiet, private place – a closet, if need be. Public worship, however, is the work of all God’s people, who gather in praising God, Who has trampled Death by death.

Man’s deepest need is not for fairness, but for forgiveness. Forgiveness is the power to liberate from past sin and restore to an individual a sense of self-worth. Forgiveness is the power to deal with justifiable guilt, not by ignoring it, but by eliminating it. Forgiveness is a medicine, which heals us at the deepest level of our being. We all need it.

While we have the power to forgive others, we need to be forgiven ourselves. We need to be forgiven by One Who has the authority to forgive. Good friends, who mean well, may say, “Don’t worry about it,” but our sin is not against them. The Scripture teaches that all sin is against God. When David had sinned by taking Bathsheba and having her husband killed, he cried out to God (*Psalms 50*) “It is You alone I have offended.” Though we may sin against people, sin ultimately is against God. While we need the forgiveness of people, we ultimately need the forgiveness of God. Only God has the authority to forgive sins.